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PSB OP 027 Excavation Report

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Site 27

The 12 structures and three features that comprise Site 27 are widely scattered over low eminences along the northwest edge of the upper terrace in the Las Huertas/Hondo pocket. There are no distinct patio-focused structure groups within the settlement and individual buildings were apparently positioned so as to take advantage of slight rises above the relatively flat terrace summit. Site 27 overlooks the Rio Las Huertas floodplain, that river lying approximately 125m to the north, while Site 25 is an equal distance to the south. Gualjoquito (Site 1) is visible from Site 27, ca. 400m north and 20m below the latter settlement. Structures 27-1, 3, and 7 were excavated from June 5-8, 1984, 32 person-days being devoted to clearing roughly 26.3m². Patricia Urban, Julie Miller, Alex Pezzatti, and Alec Harris directed these investigations.

Structure 27-1

Structure 27-1, the largest building at the site, is located in the settlement's approximate center, perched on the northern terrace margin, ca. 21m west of Str. 27-7 and 63m northwest of Str. 27-3. Suboperations 27B and 27C exposed portions of the edifice's south and west flanks, respectively, uncovering 8.8m² in the process. Digging was carried down to a maximum depth of 0.67m below modern ground surface beyond construction and 0.93m below surface within architecture. A single, clear construction phase was identified as a consequence of this work, though remnants of a possible earlier building were identified as well (F.1, TS.2).

Excavation Lots

<u>Lot</u>	<u>Contents</u>	<u>Context</u>	<u>Time Span/ Date</u>
27B/1	empty	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	3/ -
27B/2	empty	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	3/ -
27B/3	empty	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	3/ -
27B/4	empty	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	3/ -
27B/5	empty	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	3/-
27B/6	sherds <u>bajareque</u> <u>jute</u> shell(s)	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	3/-
27B/7	7 sherds 3 chert pieces 8 <u>bajareque</u> fragments 3 <u>jute</u> shells	Terminal Debris (Secondary) and Preconstruction	2,3/EPC

	1 other shell		
27B/8	3 sherds 1 stone biface 3 <u>jute</u> shells	Fill and Preconstruction	2,3/EPC
27C/1	1 <u>jute</u> shell	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	3/ -
27C/2	3 sherds 6 <u>jute</u> shells	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	3/EPC
27C/3	1 sherd 1 obsidian piece 2 <u>jute</u> shells	Preconstruction Occupation Debris (Secondary)	1/EPC
27C/4	3 sherds 1 andesite piece 1 <u>jute</u> shell	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	3/EPC
27C/5	3 sherds 1 obsidian piece 2 andesite pieces	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	3/EPC
27C/6	1 sherd 4 burnt clay fragments 1 obsidian piece 2 chert pieces 2 <u>jute</u> shells	Preconstruction Occupation Debris (Secondary)	1/EPC

Time Spans

<u>Time Span</u>	<u>Construction Phase</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>Strata</u>	<u>Features</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	-	-	S.1	-	EPC?
2	-	-	-	F.1	EPC?
3	Str. 27-1-1st	U.1-3	-	-	EPC
4	-	-	S.2	F.2,3	-

Time Span 1

Stratum 1, a light tan-to-yellow soil containing large quantities of small rocks, underlies construction on the south and west. This earth level rises 0.24m over 1.84m west to east in

Subop. 27C and is exposed to a maximum thickness of 0.28m there. The situation is considerably different in Subop. 27B where S.1 is restricted to a 0.39m north-south by 0.27m thick segment against the northern trench margin. Stratum 1 here seems to have been truncated by the introduction of F.1 in TS.2 (see below). Nowhere was S.1's base uncovered. Recovery of artifacts and associated cultural materials from this level suggests that there was human occupation nearby when S.1 was being deposited. While some items may have drifted downwards from later deposits, it seems unlikely that all of the objects found in this earth layer derived from that source.

Time Span 2

Feature 1, exposed in Subop. 27B, consists of a red-brown sandy clay underlying U.1 and set against the south, apparently cut, face of S.1. This entity rises to its revealed height of 0.34m in two distinct “steps”; the lowest, on the south, rises 0.11m, and is 1.24m wide while the next ascending element is 0.23m tall and runs back 0.8m to S.1. The preserved top of F.1 is 0.06m above that of S.1, these two elements forming a nearly continuous, relatively flat surface uncovered for 1.04m north-south. Soft, small bajareque fragments were found lying below U.1 rocks atop F.1.

Feature 1's distinctive composition and “stepped” appearance strongly imply its cultural origin. It may be the remnant of a low earthen platform that preceded Str. 27-1-1st or was introduced as fill underlying the latter's southern basal facing. The second interpretation posits exertions out of keeping with rural middle Ulua constructions of any age, involving the likely truncation of S.1 and transportation of earth not local to the immediate area. Earthen platforms, though uncommon, have been recorded in a few cases within the drainage (e.g., see Site 51). Feature 1 may be an addition to this small sample, possibly associated with a perishable summit structure as indicated by the recovery of bajareque on F.1's putative summit.

Time Span 3

Structure 27-1-1st is faced on the south and west by U.1 and 2, respectively. These constructions stand 0.36m and 0.45m high and are composed of unmodified stones set in a brown mud mortar. Unit 2 was, by far, the better preserved wall. It rests on S.1 and consists of a single line of, primarily, large rocks measuring 0.27x0.5m to 0.36 (minimally) x 0.85m. Unit 1 seems to have been made of smaller stones and sits, as noted, on F.1. Structure 27-1 rises at least 0.6m above modern ground surface and was, therefore, likely a platform of which U.1 and 2 are the surviving basal facings. If so, an undetermined amount of the brown soil exposed north of U.1 in Subop. 27B was architectural fill (U.3). This putative U.3 overlies S.1 and F.1 and probably supported an earthen floor lost to erosion long ago.

Structure 27-1-1st, therefore, was a platform that stood at least 0.6m high, was faced by low stone walls on the south and west, and oriented roughly 2 degrees (based on measurements taken on the better preserved U.2). The lower “terrace” of F.1 may still have been exposed during this interval, projecting 1.06m south of U.1 and rising 0.11m above a now-invisible ground surface. If so, Str. 27-1-1st would have stood at least 0.71m high.

Time Span 4

Stratum 2, a brown, organic-rich soil, overlies S.1 in Subop. 27C by 0.16-0.29m and mantles most Str. 27-1-1st construction. Features 2 and 3 are light to moderately dense concentrations of stones fallen from Str. 27-1-1st construction. The former extends 1.03m west of U.2, F.3 is found up to 1.24m south of U.1. Some F.3 rocks rest on the lower F.1 “step.”

Structure 27-3

Structure 27-3 is on the southeast site margin, ca. 63m southeast of Str. 27-1 and 16m southwest of Str. 27-4. Suboperations 27E, 27F, 27G, and 27J were dug in a variably successful effort to expose portions of the edifice’s north, west, and east flanks. Approximately 9.8m² were uncovered, resulting in the identification of two northern stone-faced risers raised as part of a single construction effort. Excavations were carried down to a maximum depth of 0.22m below ground surface outside construction; architectural fill was not investigated.

Excavation Lots

<u>Lot</u>	<u>Contents</u>	<u>Context</u>	<u>Time Span/ Date</u>
27E/1	1 sherd	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	1/EPC
27E/2	1 burnt clay fragment	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	1/ -
27E/3	1 sherd	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	1/EPC
27E/4	1 obsidian piece	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	1/ -
27E/5	2 sherds 2 obsidian pieces	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	1/EPC
27E/6	2 <u>bajareque</u> fragments	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	1/ -
27E/7	empty	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	1/ -
27F/1	1 sherd	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	1/EPC
27G/1	3 sherds	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	1/EPC
27J/1	-	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	1/ -

Time Spans

<u>Time Span</u>	<u>Construction Phase</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>Strata</u>	<u>Features</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	-	-	S.1	-	-

2	Str. 27-3-1st	U.1-3	-	-	EPC
3	-	-	S.2	F.1	-

Time Span 1

Stratum 1, a light tan-to-yellow soil containing numerous small rocks, was located 0.13m below modern ground surface in Subop. 27J off Str. 27-3-1st's west side. This earth layer was exposed to a maximum thickness of 0.09m, though its base was not encountered. Excavations on and around Str. 27-3-1st were generally not carried down far enough to reach S.1.

Time Span 2

Units 1 and 2 are terrace and summit facings located on Str. 27-3-1st's north side. These walls are single lines of unmodified stones, set in a brown mud mortar, that stand 0.22m and 0.21m high, respectively. Unit 1 is the basal riser, backed by what seems to have been a (primarily) earthen surface. The U.1 terrace is 3.3m wide north-south and terminates in a 0.21m-high summit ascent (U.2). The latter, in turn, is backed on the south by U.3, a brown earth fill. Attempts to locate Str. 27-3-1st's western and eastern basal facings were to no avail. Structure 27-3-1st, overall, seems to have been a largely earthen platform, stone used sparingly to face portions of its terrace and summit risers. The structure rose a reconstructed 0.56m on the north; its orientation is not clear but the platform seems to have trended generally northeast-southwest.

Time Span 3

Stratum 2, a brown, organic-rich soil, buries S.1 by 0.12-0.13m and obscures much of Str. 27-3-1st construction. Feature 1, composed of a light scattering of building stones tumbled from final-phase construction, was found embedded in S.2 in all excavations. Fallen rocks were recorded as far as 0.84m north of U.1.

Structure 27-7

Structure 27-7 is approximately 21m east of Str. 27-1 and 2.5m north of Str. 27-6. Excavations here investigated the building's south (Subop. 27H) and west (Subop. 27I) sides, along with the southwest corner (Subop. 27D). Roughly 8.4m² were cleared in the course of this work, revealing a single construction phase. Digging was carried down to a maximum depth of 0.38m below modern ground surface outside (west) of construction; the building's interior was not investigated.

Excavation Lots

<u>Lot</u>	<u>Contents</u>	<u>Context</u>	<u>Time Span/ Date</u>
27D/1	13 sherds	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	2/EPC

	2 lithics 1 andesite point		
27D/2	5 sherds	Preconstruction Occupation Debris (Secondary)	1/-
27D/3	-	Preconstruction	2/-
27D/4	4 sherds 1 obsidian piece 1 <u>bajareque</u> fragment 1 <u>jute</u> shell	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	2/EPC
27D/5	16 sherds 3 censer fragments 1 obsidian piece 1 <u>jute</u> shell	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	2/EPC
27D/6	empty	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	2/ -
27D/7	empty	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	2/ -
27D/8	3 sherds	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	2/EPC
27D/9	14 sherds 3 censer fragments 1 obsidian piece 2 andesite pieces	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	2/EPC
27D/10	6 sherds 2 lithic pieces	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	2/EPC
27H/1	20 sherds 3 andesite pieces 2 <u>bajareque</u> fragments	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	2/EPC
27I/1	11 sherds 2 obsidian pieces 2 andesite pieces	Terminal Debris (Secondary)	2/EPC

Time Spans

<u>Time Span</u>	<u>Construction Phase</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>Strata</u>	<u>Features</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	-	-	S.1	-	?

2	Str. 27-7-1st	U.1,2	-	-	EPC
3	-	-	S.2	F.1	-

Time Span 1

Stratum 1, a light brown-to-yellow soil containing large numbers of small rocks, runs beneath exposed construction in Subop. 27D (relations between architecture and S.1 were not investigated elsewhere on the building). This earth layer was uncovered to a maximum thickness of 0.17m; its base was not exposed. The level rises a scant 0.03m over 0.95m west-to-east. The few artifacts retrieved from S.1 may hint at occupation in the area during its deposition; the objects in question, however, may have been redeposited from later levels.

Time Span 2

Units 1 and 2 appear to be the western and southern foundations for a surface-level building. The former consists of unmodified cobbles at least some of which are set on end. Unit 2 is composed of flat-laid cobbles. Both walls are one stone (0.11-0.19m) high and consist of rocks 0.17x0.18m to 0.13x0.22m in size. No coursing or chinking stones were noted. A mud mortar was used as a binding agent in U.1 and 2. Structure 27-7-1st is oriented 15 degrees on the west and 102 degrees on the south.

Time Span 3

Stratum 2, a dark brown, organic rich soil, buries S.1 by 0.2-0.21m and mantles the majority of Str. 27-7-1st architecture. A light scattering of rocks fallen from final phase construction was found near U.1 and 2, embedded in S.2. Feature 1 is part of this tumbled debris, extending 0.33m west of U.1.

Chronological Summary

Occupation and construction at Site 27 is restricted to the Early Postclassic. Even material predating exposed architecture seem to pertain to this span. The relative paucity of recovered artifacts hints at short-term settlement here, possibly for only a small portion of the entire chronological interval.

Architectural Summary

Site 27 Early Postclassic buildings consist of both low platforms and surface-level edifices. The former were primarily made of earth with unmodified stones used sparingly as terrace, summit, and basal facings. Units in the last category rise 0.21-0.45m high. Only one terrace width was reconstructed, measuring 3.3m across (Str. 27-3-1st). As noted above, Str. 27-1-1st may have also been fronted by a terrace on the south, though this 0.11m-high by 1.06m-wide construction is fashioned completely of earth (an extension of F.1, see below). The two platforms, Strs. 27-1-1st and 27-3-1st, stand 0.71m (minimally) and 0.56m high. The

foundations delimiting surface-level Str. 27-7-1st are 0.11-0.19m high and are fashioned out of a combination of flat- and vertically-set stones. The rocks used in this construction are medium-size cobbles, 0.17x0.18m to 0.13x0.22m in size. A brown mud mortar was used to help hold the stones of all investigated walls in place; coursing and chinking stones were not attested to in any case. The three buildings examined in 1984 are generally oriented north-south, the two measured examples being aligned between 2 and 15 degrees.

In addition to edifices delimited by stone walls and foundations, a single example of what may well be an earthen platform was revealed below Str. 27-1-1st (F.1). This construction is 0.34m high, made of red-brown sandy clay, and is ascended on the south by means of two low risers. The lowest riser is 0.11m high and 1.24m wide. Recovery of bajareque fragments atop F.1's low "terrace," buried by later construction (U.1), hints at the former existence of a perishable superstructure that was raised atop F.1.